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# Rewilding – Departures in Conservation Policy and Practice? An Evaluation of Developments in Britain

Sophie Wynne-Jones<sup>a, #</sup>, Graham Strouts<sup>b</sup>, Callum O'Neil<sup>c</sup>, and Chris Sandom<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a, b, c</sup>School of Natural Sciences, Bangor University, Wales, United Kingdom

<sup>d</sup>University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom

<sup>#</sup>Corresponding author. E-mail: s.wynne-jones@bangor.ac.uk

## Abstract

Rewilding has been hailed as 'radical' and 'agenda-setting' in the challenge it poses to mainstream conservation. This paper questions whether that is still the case, or if rewilding is now being mainstreamed and with what consequences? Our analysis focuses upon developments in Britain, up until 2018, discussing what changes have become manifest and the barriers and restraints that have been observed. As such, we evaluate the extent to which rewilding – in practice – departs from longstanding conservation sensibilities. Discussion is structured around three key questions— Who is now involved in rewilding across Britain? What they are seeking to do, in terms of how nature is conceptualised and managed (or not)? In what ways do their objectives involve people and human-centred aspirations? Our findings reveal three key differences from current conservation approaches. First, rewilding is associated with a proliferation of new actors, new mechanisms of finance and new spaces of conservation interest. Second, rewilding as an approach exhibits clear novelty in its stated aim to be nature-led and, despite challenges, attempts to work through ongoing negotiation and experimentation. Finally, rewilding is currently being advocated and pursued as an agenda for people *and* nature, which moves beyond earlier nature conservation paradigms of protecting nature from human influence. However, it remains to be seen whether rewilding advocates can realise their ambitions to popularise and create peopled wild spaces across Britain's landscapes.

**Keywords:** Rewilding, conservation governance, anthropocene, future-nature, biopolitics

## INTRODUCTION

Rewilding has been hailed as 'radical' and 'agenda-setting' in the challenge it poses to mainstream conservation, offering an ambitious and optimistic response to accelerating environmental crises (Taylor 2005; Monbiot 2013; Lorimer et al. 2015). But given that it is an approach spanning over twenty years of intellectual gestation and practical experimentation (Foreman 2004; Jørgensen 2015; Johns 2019),

is it still breaking the mould and defying convention, or are these ideas now being mainstreamed? Recent research emphasises the heterogeneous character of rewilding (Gammon 2018; Sandom et al. 2019), noting a proliferation of projects and uptake beyond the organisations and sites initially assessed by early analyses (Taylor 2011; Jepson et al. 2018; Sandom and Wynne-Jones 2019). These emerging cases suggest that rewilding is evolving and responding to different contexts and challenges arising (Wynne-Jones et al. 2018), although some contend that it is losing its identity and critical edge (Foreman 2018). There is a consequent need to take stock of developments, to assess the extent to which rewilding has become constitutive of a new regime of conservation governance, and what modifications have occurred along the way.

Our analysis focuses upon rewilding developments in Britain<sup>1</sup> up until 2018. We examine the changes, barriers and restraints that have been observed, and evaluate the extent

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to which rewilding – in practice - departs from longstanding conservation sensibilities. Our discussion is structured around three key points— Firstly, who is involved? Responding to, and building on, earlier arguments that position rewilding as a radical agenda sitting outside of mainstream conservation (Lorimer and Driessen 2014; Jepson 2016), we ask whether this continues to be the case, exploring which actors and interests are now evident.

We then turn to the specifics of the agenda being advanced, evaluating the ways in which rewilding is being conceptualised and how this in turn informs what actions are undertaken (or otherwise). Herein, we assess the change that rewilding represents biopolitically i.e. the ways in which rewilding, as a form of conservation governance, engenders particular means of administering and managing life, underpinned by specific ways of knowing ‘nature’ (Lorimer and Driessen 2016; Biermann and Anderson 2017).

In the literature, rewilding is seen to depart from ‘compositional’ approaches, centred on designated species and features (Lorimer et al. 2015), focusing instead upon the integrity of ecosystem processes and functionality (Lorimer and Driessen 2016; Svenning et al. 2016; du Toit 2019). The imperative for ‘management’ is ostensibly reconsidered, with lost species returned (or comparable species substituted to reinstate trophic processes) and impediments on natural-function removed in order to reinstate a more ‘self-willed’ ecosystem (Fisher and Parfitt 2016). However, there is notable uncertainty and tension surrounding these objectives— specifically, the degree to which ‘rewilders’ are aiming to return to a desired ‘past’ state of ‘unfettered’ nature, or whether they position wildness in future-orientated terms, prioritising non-human autonomy without preconception of ‘end-points’ (Lorimer and Driessen 2016; Prior and Ward 2016). Herein, the degree of overlap between rewilding and longer-standing objectives for ecological restoration is placed in question, with those who see rewilding as working to past-baselines, contending that it has much in common with restoration agendas (Hayward et al. 2019). However, others who see it as a more radical departure from previous approaches emphasise the functionality of ecosystems foremost, embracing the potential for novelty in the species assemblage and unanticipated outcomes, rather than seeking to reproduce lost conditions (Biermann and Anderson 2017; du Toit 2019). We examine how these contentions are now being negotiated by practitioners across Britain. We also consider how such objectives are being achieved, and specifically whether the pursuit of ‘wildness’ is truly a process of stepping back and letting go.

Our third and final area of discussion is the extent to which rewilding is dividing the human and non-human, in terms of objectives set by advocates. This is highlighted as a continuing area of debate with several authors outlining how wildness can encapsulate a range of ontological positions – from primitivist retreat through to more fluid conceptions wherein wildness can be actively produced rather than returned to (Lorimer and Driessen 2016; Prior and Brady 2016; Ward 2019). These have differing implications for justice and conflict (see e.g. Crowley

et al. 2017; Deary and Warren 2017; DeSilvey and Bartolini 2018; Vasile 2018; Wynne-Jones et al. 2018), depending on whether human history and involvement is erased, or more profound forms of intervention (e.g. back-breeding or genetic modification) are legitimated (Beirmann and Anderson 2017: 8). It is, therefore, a critical area for discussion in our evaluation of emerging initiatives.

Overall, as Lorimer and Driessen (2016) and Biermann and Anderson (2017) point out, rewilding offers a broad spectrum of biopolitical possibilities with differing degrees of departure from traditional conservation approaches. To date, these have remained contested and the direction of travel unclear. Our evaluation looks at what is now becoming apparent in the British context.

This paper also responds to numerous reviews calling for substantive empirical evaluation of rewilding to ground the wealth of theoretical discussions emerging (Pettorelli et al. 2018). Some case-based evaluations have been conducted, of species reintroductions (e.g. Buller 2008; Crowley et al. 2017; Drenthen 2015; Vasile 2018) and area-based projects (e.g. Convery and Dutson 2008; Lorimer and Driessen 2014; DeSilvey and Bartolini 2018; Overend and Lorimer 2018; Wynne-Jones et al. 2018), along with analyses of specific organisations (Jepson et al. 2018). Here we present empirical analysis across 17 initiatives in Scotland, England and Wales, (see section 2 for details of selection criteria), to enable assessment of broader patterns and characteristics.

Why look at Britain? One might fairly question whether it is an appropriate location at all for rewilding to progress given the density of population, associated infrastructure, and consequent pressures on the environment. However, this is exactly the reason many advocates give for rewilding to be taken forwards here - in an effort to enable nature to flourish on this crowded island (Monbiot 2013). In addition, we have seen a wide range of experimentation and engagement with rewilding here over the last ten years (see Table 1), accelerating notably since the publication of Monbiot’s (2013) best-selling treatise *Feral*. As a country with a well-established conservation landscape, including clearly demarked governance institutions, frameworks and attendant rationalities (Evans 2002), Britain also offers a useful case to explore the extent of change within and beyond these structures. This is not only in terms of how established norms and procedure are being modified or re-interpreted, but also in terms of the potentially new conservation geographies – of actors and sites - that are coming into play through rewilding.

The UK’s vote to leave the EU has also created heightened interest in rural land-use, with the rewilding movement benefiting from the purported opportunities offered by Brexit in terms of land availability and supporting policy frameworks (Wentworth and Alison 2016). Specifically, the heightened focus on environmental enhancement and measurable public benefits (e.g. Downing and Coe 2018) could be seen to work in support of rewilding advocacy. Consequently, we explore the extent of, and rationales espoused through, rewilding developments in this emergent policy context.

**Table 1**  
**Rewilding projects evaluated**

Project Name	Organisation(s) involved	Dates from	Country	Website(s)
Alladale Wilderness Reserve	Private Estate	2003	Scotland	<a href="http://www.alladale.com/">http://www.alladale.com/</a>
Li and Coire Dhorrcail	Partnership: John Muir Trust and Knoydart Foundation	1987 1997 Knoydart Foundation established	Scotland	<a href="https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/trust-land/knoydart">https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/trust-land/knoydart</a> <a href="http://www.knoydart-foundation.com/">http://www.knoydart-foundation.com/</a>
Creag Meagaidh	Scottish Natural Heritage	1985	Scotland	<a href="http://www.nnr-scotland.org.uk/creag-meagaidh/">http://www.nnr-scotland.org.uk/creag-meagaidh/</a>
Cairngorms Connect (Incorporates Glenfeshie & Aberneithy)	Partnership: RSPB (Aberneithy), Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission and private land owners including the Glenfeshie Estate.	2018 1998 RSPB at Aberneithy Other estates longstanding	Scotland	<a href="http://cairngormsconnect.org.uk/">http://cairngormsconnect.org.uk/</a> <a href="https://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/loch-garten/">https://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/loch-garten/</a> <a href="http://www.glenfeshie.scot/Glenfeshie/Glenfeshie_Estate_Welcome.html">http://www.glenfeshie.scot/Glenfeshie/Glenfeshie_Estate_Welcome.html</a>
Mar Lodge	National Trust	1995	Scotland	<a href="http://www.nts.org.uk/Visit/Mar-Lodge-Estate/">http://www.nts.org.uk/Visit/Mar-Lodge-Estate/</a>
Trees for Life	Trees for Life	1993 Glenaffric and Glenmoriston 2008 Dundreggan	Scotland	<a href="http://treesforlife.org.uk">http://treesforlife.org.uk</a>
Glenlude	John Muir Trust	2003	Scotland	<a href="https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/trust-land/glenlude">https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/trust-land/glenlude</a>
Carrifran Wildwood	Partnership: John Muir Trust & Borders Forest Trust	2000	Scotland	<a href="http://www.carrifran.org.uk">http://www.carrifran.org.uk</a> <a href="http://bordersforesttrust.org/places/wild-heart/">http://bordersforesttrust.org/places/wild-heart/</a>
Community of Arran Seabed Trust	COAST	1995	Scotland	<a href="http://www.arrancoast.com">http://www.arrancoast.com</a>
Wild Ennerdale	Partnership: National Trust, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission.	2001	England	<a href="http://www.wildennerdale.co.uk">http://www.wildennerdale.co.uk</a>
Cambrian Wildwood	Partnership: Wales Wild Land Foundation & Woodland Trust	2007 WWLF 2017 Bwlch Corog	Wales	<a href="https://www.cambrianwildwood.org">https://www.cambrianwildwood.org</a>
Summit to Sea	Partnership: Led by Rewilding Britain & Woodland Trust	2018	Wales	<a href="http://www.summit2sea.wales/">http://www.summit2sea.wales/</a>
River Wandle	Wandle River Trust	2012	England	<a href="http://www.wandletrust.org">www.wandletrust.org</a>
Knepp Estate	Private Estate	n/a	England	<a href="https://knepp.co.uk">https://knepp.co.uk</a>
Wicken Fen	National Trust	n/a	England	<a href="https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wicken-fen-nature-reserve">https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wicken-fen-nature-reserve</a>
Great Fen Project	Partnership: Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Natural England, District Council	2001	England	<a href="http://www.greatfen.org.uk">http://www.greatfen.org.uk</a>

## DATA AND METHODS

The paper draws on data derived through a combination of interviews, ethnography and textual analysis. This includes 16 formal research interviews with rewilding advocates,<sup>2</sup> practitioners and project staff across Britain, undertaken by authors 1, 2 and 3, between 2016-2018; specifically pertaining to the initiatives shown in Table 1.<sup>3</sup> Site visits and observations were also undertaken (locations shown in Figure 1) in conjunction with evaluation of project management plans and strategy documentation. Long-term ethnographic engagement (including repeat informal interviews and observations) with the rewilding movement in Wales, and a period of earlier interviews (in 2005-2006) with key instigators was also undertaken by author 1 (see Wynne-Jones et al. 2018). In addition, Author 4 conducted

a series of 'rewilding knowledge exchange' workshops with wider conservation and land-use interests across England (Sandom et al. 2019). Lastly, textual analysis was conducted on publicity and outreach material.

The projects under discussion here were chosen due to either their self-identification as rewilding or listing by Rewilding Britain as exemplar projects (to which they had consented).<sup>4</sup> The recently announced Summit to Sea project, led by Rewilding Britain, was also included in our analysis along with Wicken Fen and the Great Fen, which have been listed by others.<sup>5</sup> These selection criteria mean that we do not discuss 'unintentional' forms of rewilding, where land abandonment is leading to outcomes that rewilding advocates have otherwise applauded. This is due to a lack of comprehensive data on the extent of such changes. For the purposes of this paper we have also chosen not to discuss



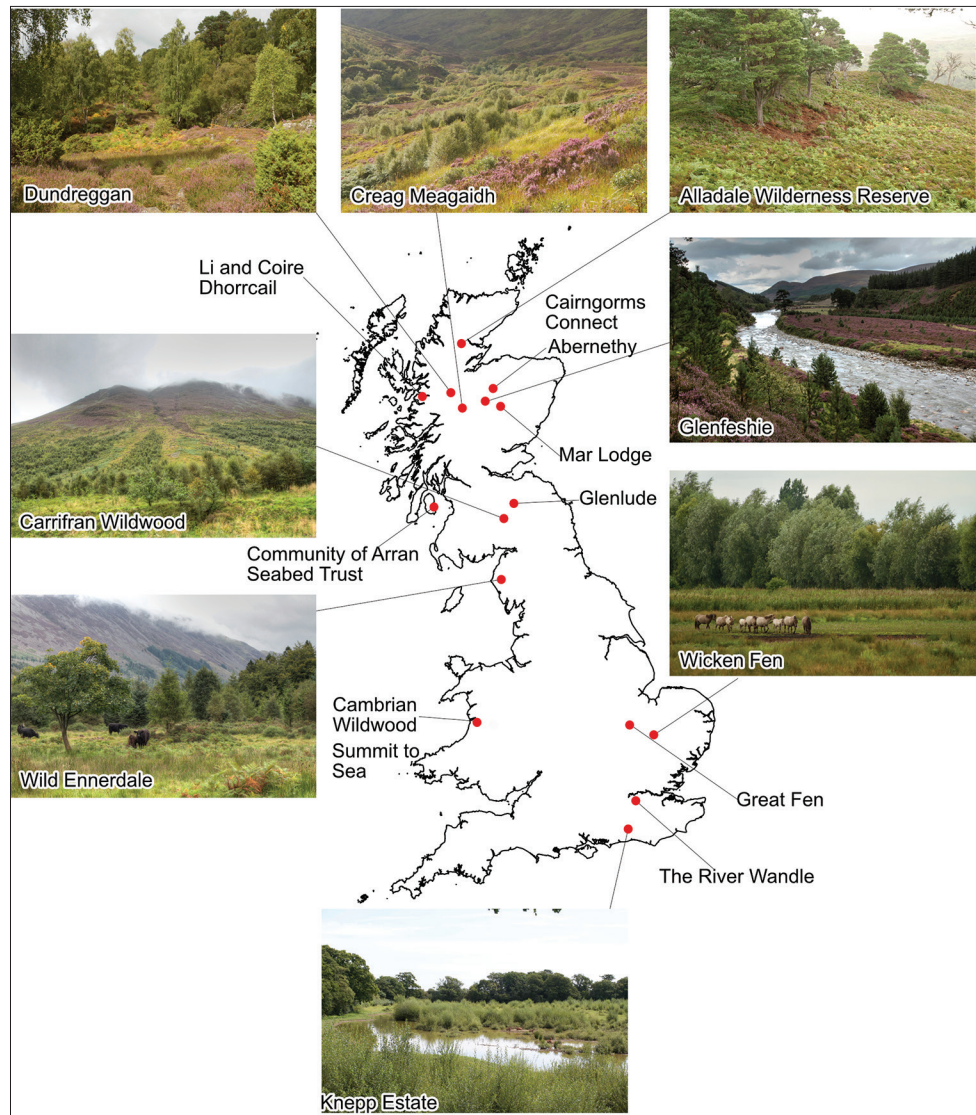


Figure 1  
Location of projects. Photos Chris Sandom

animal reintroductions operating in isolation from wider changes in land-management (although see Sandom and Wynne-Jones 2019).

A recent parliamentary review (Wentworth and Alison 2016) outlines that rewilding “generally refers to reinstating natural processes that would have occurred in the absence of human activity...” with an emphasis upon ‘self-regulating natural processes’ into the longer term. Whilst this broad definition fits all of the projects in question here, we acknowledge that there is no single *accepted* definition of rewilding, despite many calls for clearer parameters (Pettorelli et al. 2018). It is not the intention of this paper to reach tighter stipulations around what should and should not be regarded as rewilding. Instead, we are interested in the way rewilding has been embraced and remoulded in multiple ways and to differing degrees. The very fact that rewilding is changing and proliferating as a diverse movement is central to the analysis presented here.

## FINDINGS

The follow section presents and discusses our findings, exploring who is now involved in rewilding and what objectives they hold.

### Avant-garde or mainstream?

Earlier discussions of rewilding have presented it as a movement on the cutting-edge of conservation, with instigators acting outside of the mainstream. Almost by definition, rewilding has been framed as a critique and counter to the mainstay of conservation endeavour. Established governance frameworks prescribing what is valued, and how this is monitored and maintained, can work against some of rewilding’s central principles – namely the celebration of more emergent and dynamic conceptualisations of nature (Lorimer 2015; Jepson and Schepers 2016). It is perhaps unsurprising then that observations

thus far have centred on the pioneering work of key individuals like Frans Vera and new organisations like Rewilding Europe (Drenthen 2009; Lorimer and Driessen 2013 and 2014; Jepson et al. 2018). Here we question whether rewilding is now entering a new phase of wider engagement, as well as acknowledging the contribution of a broader array of actors.

Whilst Rewilding Europe (est. 2011), and actors within the Dutch conservation sector who initiated the charity, were certainly at the forefront of publically championing rewilding from the 1990s onwards, many UK conservation professionals were intrigued early on by Vera's ideas about the 'natural state' of ecosystems and the dynamics affecting this (Taylor 2005; Parkes 2006). Coming together from the early 2000s through groupings including the British Association of Nature Conservation, Wildland Network and Wildland Research Institute, a diverse array of actors began to debate the relevance and implications of this new conservation paradigm (see e.g. Kirby 2004; Hodder et al. 2009; Taylor 2011; Sandom et al. 2013). This was linked to emerging questions around the appropriate scale (spatial and temporal) of conservation efforts, to enable resilience in the face of advancing, anthropogenic-induced environmental change (Lawton et al. 2010; Lorimer 2012). It also occurred alongside a broader surge of interest in the potential, and importance, of wild land in Scotland (Interviewee 27). It is from this period, in the early and mid-2000s, that initial practical experimentation – and many of the projects in question here – stemmed (Ward et al. 2006).<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, although the publication of Monbiot's (2013) *Feral* is commonly regarded as the watershed in rewilding's ascendance in Britain, it is important to appreciate this longer gestation, which provided the groundwork for Monbiot's clarion calls. Indeed, many of these actors then came together to support the formation of Rewilding Britain in 2015 (Interviewees 27 and 19). Tellingly, however, there was a strong sense that a *new* organisation was needed to take this agenda forward:

*"an organisation that can say the awkward things that [other organisations] can't say and can push [these organisations] further than had previously been comfortable. So, opening space, basically for [others] to move into..." (Interviewee 19)*

Reviewing the actors and type of projects present at the outset, it is evident that smaller bespoke entities and pioneering individuals played a formative role and were certainly some of the first to publicly pronounce their actions as rewilding – with Trees for Life and Alladale in Scotland, and Knepp Castle in the South of England (see Table 1 for project start dates). Yet formalised conservation NGOs and government associated environment bodies were not absent, with Wild Ennerdale demonstrating the interest of the National Trust, Forestry Commission and Environment Agency in the Lake District. Whilst in Scotland<sup>7</sup>, large public and charitably owned estates were also beginning to experiment with a 'reduced intervention' approach, aiming to reinstate more 'natural' condition and processes, reflecting the wider questioning of conservation norms (Parkes 2006).

Amongst these NGOs and public bodies, the John Muir Trust (JMT) took a leading role with Li and Coire Dhorrcail on Knoydart, in Scotland, and in partnering with the Borders Forest Trust in the establishment of Carrifran. JMT were also the first NGO to outline an official policy statement on rewilding (John Muir Trust 2015b), perhaps unsurprisingly given the close fit of their established remit as a 'wild land' charity, with rewilding objectives. Today, an increasing cross-section of UK NGOs now have a policy statement on rewilding (e.g. RSPB 2017; Woodland Trust 2017), outlining how rewilding can work to support their particular objectives. Although, for some this has been a more cautious embrace:

*"We recognise a lot of what we do constitutes as rewilding. I think we would rather call it landscape scale habitat restoration really... There's a strong overlap in what we are doing and what others are promoting as rewilding, but the term itself doesn't suit our approach... and because of its toxic rejection amongst some people." (Interviewee 23)*

Tellingly, even for those initiatives most closely aligned and comfortable with the term, care was expressed in terms of how and with whom they would use the term. These sensitivities were largely connected to negative associations with large carnivore reintroductions and the divisive nature of publicity surrounding Monbiot's (2013) *Feral*. Hence, organisations were keen to assert exactly how they were interpreting and applying rewilding, or when necessary eschewing this loaded term.

*"We're a bit judicious on how and where we use it. So if we're going to work with land owners we might steer clear and not use the term" (Interviewee 22)*

*"I've no problem with [the project] featuring under the umbrella of rewilding. We just explain where we're coming from in relation to that" (Interviewee 24)*

This wider uptake, and the concerns equally noted, can in many ways be tied to the policy window that Brexit has opened up, with rewilding explicitly framed as an option for future land-use policy (Wentworth and Alison 2016; Diamond 2017), ushering the spectre of wider change. Whilst advocates such as Taylor (2005) have long made the point that the European Common Agricultural Policy acts as a barrier to the wider proliferation of conservation activity, by stabilising the farming sector, this argument is now being mainstreamed (Monbiot 2013). Consequently, conservation organisations have been keen to secure their interests in a future operating outside of this policy framework. Yet equally, the insecurity and tension this has created amongst rural stakeholders has meant that the excitement of new possibilities also has to be tempered with a commitment to the communities that are set to suffer marked dis-benefits from the changes under way – a point we return to below.

Alongside the gradual engagement of 'mainstream' conservation bodies, new organisations have continued to emerge, including the Wales Wild Land Foundation (in 2007) and Rewilding Britain itself (in 2015), who then formally entered a partnership with Rewilding Europe in 2017. Looking more widely, novel partnerships are a key feature across a

range of emerging projects, demonstrating the high levels of innovation and energy that rewilding has inspired – and seems to require (Interviewees 20, 25 and 24). Here it was noted that institutional constraints might otherwise hamper innovation and flexibility.

*“there was such a lot of energy and interest and I think that one of our advantages is that we are small and can be kind of agile and can operate almost as a sort of start-up company rather than an NGO...” Interviewee 20*

Established organisations are working together to realise larger scale visions, like the Great Fen Project and Cairngorms Connect, and bigger NGOs are working with community groups and small emerging charities. For example, the Woodland Trust has collaborated with Wales Wild Land Foundation on the Cambrian Wildwood. Co-investment with community stakeholders is also a distinctive feature in Scotland, given the supporting legal framework there.<sup>8</sup> It is also an area of interest for projects elsewhere (pers. comm. Rewilding Britain 2019). Herein, an important emphasis is being placed on supporting bottom-up engagement, with projects led by groups that are proximal and more rooted in locales. This was something many respondents considered to be critical (Interviewees 15, 22, 20, 26, 27), seeking to counter criticisms of rewilding as an ‘outside agenda’ being parachuted in (see Wynne-Jones et al. 2018).

There has also been an increase in the number of private actors involved, as part of wider partnerships like Cairngorms Connect and Summit to Sea, or working with organisations like Trees for Life, as well as those expressing an interest in post-Brexit ‘diversification’ following the model of Knepp (Rewilding Britain. pers. comm. 2018). Private donors and philanthropists are also playing an increasing role, whether through the donation of existing estates (such as Glenlude now managed by the JMT), or providing substantive funding to emerging initiatives (as was the case for Cambrian Wildwood).

Reflecting more widely on the issue of finance, a range of novel mechanisms for supporting and facilitating rewilding are evident, showing a transition away from traditional reliance on charitable funding sources. Here, a notable theme (which connects to our discussion in section 3.3) is the increasing link between rewilding and ‘nature-based’ business enterprise. This is very notable in the advocacy of Rewilding Britain (echoing the thinking of Rewilding Europe, e.g. Rewilding Europe 2017), framing rewilding as a more economically resilient approach to land-use, with potential to draw new revenue streams. For the private estates in question, nature-based tourism is a key feature. Similarly, for emerging projects, the apparent potential that rewilding offers to diversify the traditional rural land economy is being celebrated, even if they are not seeking to operate themselves as standalone business enterprises (Interviewee 15).

‘Payments for ecosystem services’ have featured strongly in these discussions (Woodland Trust 2017; Sandom et al. 2019). Here, by working to restore natural processes, rewilding is framed as providing desirable ‘eco-commodities’ including carbon sequestration and flood mitigation, with work now

ensuing to connect projects to corporate and public sector buyers (Rewilding Britain and Friends of the Earth 2016; Rewilding Britain 2018). Even where direct financial rewards are not being sought, the rhetoric of ecosystem service provision was utilised by a number of respondents to champion their projects (Interviewees 22 and 24). This was not, however, universal and many longer-standing projects were notable in their lack of engagement with such framings and associated efforts to develop a business arm to their projects (Interviewee 25), suggesting that this is an approach being favoured by more recent projects. However, a review of *current* income streams and finance used to secure existing sites demonstrates that to-date rewilding has not departed significantly from longer-standing models of reliance upon charitable (including philanthropic) and public sector funding. Nonetheless, we can see notable *aspiration* for a more financially diverse, and to some extent commercialised, approach to gaining conservation funding suggesting a certain degree of novelty in the approach that is being pursued (c.f. Brockington et al. 2012; Büscher et al. 2014).

Overall, we have seen a marked expansion from pioneer projects, with wider levels of engagement including both ‘mainstream’ conservation actors (including NGOs and government associated bodies) and more bespoke initiatives. This demonstrates that rewilding is moving beyond a niche, with a diverse array of actors now coalescing around this new way of thinking. This not only suggests movement within the conservation sector through the embrace of new ideas, but also reflects a wider opening of conservation activities and enterprise beyond traditional actors and mechanisms of finance. As such, we contend that whilst rewilding clearly now has a place amongst the ‘mainstream’ of conservation, innovation and novelty continue to be key features in driving it forward. To better understand the implications of the trends outlined, we now take a closer look at what projects are seeking to do.

## How wild? Openness and risk

In the following section we focus on two questions, firstly whether ‘rewilders’ are working to restore past states, or seeking a ‘future nature’, and secondly, to what extent is their approach ‘nature-led’. Moving towards a *wilder* ecological state is one of the most important areas of distinction for rewilding (Jepson and Shepers 2016). Yet, tensions have persisted around whether rewilders are working towards objectives drawn from historical baselines, or whether their efforts to repair ecosystems is forward-looking and working from current contexts and possibilities. Whilst some early rewilding proposals were clearly informed by past contexts (Jørgensen 2015; Johns 2019), a focus on historical baselines has been widely criticised. The majority of projects reviewed here demonstrate a clear sensitivity to the difficulties of using past baselines, and strongly rejected such a stance. This concurs with Deary and Warren’s (2017) observations in Scotland and Lorimer and Driessen’s (2016) discussion of Rewilding Europe’s stance.



1 “Rewilding, and certainly what [we] are doing, needs  
2 to be about the future and asking what do we want in the  
3 future for these landscapes...if there's a bandwagon that says  
4 let's turn the clock back 4000 years then we're not on it.”  
5 (Interviewee 22)

6 “The ‘re’ [of rewilding] does suggest that we are trying to  
7 take it back to some previous state that we want, and I am not  
8 sure that is what we are really doing, we are just trying to let  
9 a wild state emerge” (Interviewee 16)

10 As such, practitioners in Britain now appear to be less  
11 concerned with a particular imaginary and moment of  
12 what wild should be, and more orientated towards realising  
13 natures' potential. This aligns with a wider adoption, within  
14 the conservation world, of 'future nature' approaches  
15 (Collard et al. 2015). Nonetheless, there was acknowledgement  
16 that projects were informed and inspired by past states, drawing  
17 on archaeological and palaeoecological data (Interviewees  
18 15, 24 and 25), but not strictly wedded to reconstructing  
19 them (in contrast with aspirations for ecological restoration,  
20 c.f. Hayward et al. 2019). Equally, an ethical commitment to  
21 what has been lost was often articulated, but not fixated-on as  
22 a romanticised notion of purity to be achieved. This compares  
23 well with Mackinnon's (2013) description of the past as a  
24 measure of possibility, not only a lament (Collard et al. 2015:  
25 327). It differentiates rewilding as observed here from a more  
26 radical 'new conservation' position which fully rejects past  
27 reference (e.g. Kareiva et al. 2012).

28 “Future natural is a term we use... we're not turning  
29 the clock back to any previous state... why would you pick  
30 that point? Was it natural? ...However, we can look to our  
31 past, there's lots of evidence... and that helps influence our  
32 thinking... you can understand how people have lived off that  
33 land...” (Interviewee 24)

34 “We have to be careful about using words such as “back”  
35 since it implies having a fixed point in the past that you are  
36 trying to emulate or return to... but we get clues... that gives  
37 you ideas as to how it could be again.” (Interviewee 15)

38 In place of identifying a particular point they were aiming  
39 for, respondents stressed an ambition to step back, to let go  
40 and allow nature more autonomy.

41 “It's not talking creating pristine wilderness. It's talking  
42 about letting nature, you know natural processes take hold.”  
43 (Interviewee 27)

44 In many instances this was articulated as 'learning from  
45 nature' to ensure a more effective means of doing conservation.  
46 This explains the rejection of a need to return to a fixed point,  
47 as this would work directly against the perceived need for  
48 dynamism (c.f. Manning et al. 2009; Lorimer 2012). Here again  
49 we see wider points of connection with the thinking of 'new  
50 conservation' proponents, and their emphasis upon an innately  
51 resilient nature, but a sense that some support (i.e. repair and  
52 restoration) is needed to allow this resilience to occur.

53 *The natural systems that make up the planet are dynamic,*  
54 *they have adapted and evolved to changing conditions... We*  
55 *need to act to protect, restore and recreate ecosystems and build*  
56 *resilience in the natural environment. This means working with*

*natural processes, enabling natural systems to be dynamic,*  
*adaptable and robust.* (Woodland Trust 2017)

Reducing intervention and becoming more nature-led was a  
common point of alignment, even for projects that were more  
nervous about the broader 'rewilding' label, and was expressed  
as a key principle for Rewilding Britain.

*Natural processes drive outcomes: Rewilding seeks to*  
*reinstate natural processes – for example, the free movement*  
*of rivers, natural grazing, habitat succession and predation. It*  
*is not geared to reach any human-defined optimal point or end*  
*state. It goes where nature takes it.* (Rewilding Britain 2017)

This is evidenced in project management plans which  
revealed a consistent ambition to give nature greater freedom  
to 'take its course'. For example, the owners of the Knepp  
Estate indicate that they believe their approach is 'radically  
different to conventional nature conservation in that it is not  
driven by specific goals or target species' (Knepp Estate 2017).  
At Wicken Fen, the National Trust identifies a contrast between  
working with natural processes and setting narrow species-  
driven goals (The National Trust 2009). This appears to support  
arguments that hail rewilding as a new biopolitical regime  
in conservation governance, departing from old measures  
and framings of success and, perhaps more substantively,  
denominations of who/what is governing who (Biermann and  
Anderson 2017).

However, whilst *aspirations* to reduce human intervention  
were notable, for the majority of projects this was not being  
realised in the immediate term with none of the projects taking  
a zero-management approach. Instead, various actions were  
being undertaken with the aim of restoring functionality,  
repairing impeding damage, and removing limiting factors.  
This included removal of human infrastructure or physical  
impacts e.g. weirs and drainage ditches<sup>9</sup>); (re)introducing  
missing or depleted fauna; planting missing flora; and  
managing large herbivore population dynamics in the absence  
of large predators (e.g. culling or exclusion fencing (Newton  
and Ashmole 2000; Wild Ennerdale 2006; Roberts 2010; John  
Muir Trust 2012 and 2015a; Knepp Estate 2017; Trees for Life  
2017; WWLF 2017). In some instances, explicit targets had  
been set (i.e. for desired habitat condition and composition)  
to restore ecosystems to more functional state which could  
then develop naturally through ecological processes (Newton  
and Ashmole 2000; Trees for Life pers. comm. 2017). Such  
interventions evidence a conception of damage, complicating  
readings that nature – in any state – is always, already resilient  
(Tsing et al. 2017). Whilst we see a strong aspiration to learn  
from nature and enable greater self-governance within natural  
systems, there was still a sense that there was an optimal state  
to be achieved before such 'release' could occur. A critical  
dimension of this was that anthropocentric presence was  
often conceptualised as a continuing impediment on healthy  
functionality.

Beyond these initial interventions, or active forms of  
rewilding, which appeared to be necessary for most projects  
under consideration, there was also a sense of restriction  
continuing to be imposed into the future with stakeholders



outlining ambitions to be nature-led ‘as far as possible’. Management plans included qualifying statements such as ‘as much freedom as possible’, ‘unless an estate asset is under risk’. Risks to human life and property were also considered, particularly with regards to fire and flood risk management, with some noting greater capacity to experiment if there were no human settlements close by (Interviewee 24).

Limitations also arose in relation to current governance frameworks and objectives (i.e. SSSI, NNR or Natura 2000 designations), which organisations had a duty towards. For example, respondents explained that successional processes were being halted and/or the introduction of flora not undertaken in some instances, or particular areas, if designated features were threatened. However, for some projects such restrictions were of lesser concern where initiatives were largely operating on non-designated sites (e.g. both the Cambrian and Carrifran Wildwoods, Glenlude, and some of the Trees for Life areas) or extending far beyond the confines of a core designated site (e.g. Wild Ennerdale, The Great Fen Project, Cairngorms Connect, Summit to Sea). Yet even here there were clear challenges noted in how projects should be monitored and reporting, for example whether descriptors like ‘favourable management’ should be used in place of assessing ‘favourable condition’.

Beyond reporting requirements and statutory duties, funding stipulations also resulted in a less flexible approach. For example, government tree planting grants (which several projects utilised or considered) have set targets in terms of ‘planting success rates.’ Hence a tighter management regime was needed where such funding was being drawn upon. In some instances, this required a substantial input of labour to ensure the continued survival of planted flora. This paradoxical situation was discussed by several interviewees, with a number of projects highlighting a preference for less interventionist approaches. For example, rather than planting extensive areas (as was done at Carrifran Wildwood for example), the Cambrian Wildwood proposes planting smaller areas to provide a seed source that would enable natural regeneration into the longer term, but in a less managed fashion where outcomes were more uncertain. This was presented as a commitment to the future rather than setting fixed requirements for immediate results.

This approach was also discussed as one with lower financial burden, which was noted as a point of attraction for rewilding compared to conventional conservation management (Wentworth and Alison 2016). Yet larger NGOs also noted the risks associated, both in managing potential ‘failures’ (e.g. where trees do not establish) and the difficulties in communicating the rationale of such approach to public visitors and supporters who want to see more rapid changes in the landscape. Such concerns demonstrate an underlying target for what the landscape *should* look like, and in these instances the ‘rewilding’ or ‘natural-process-led’ method seems more a tool rather than an end point. This was echoed in statements where natural processes were articulated as the best means to achieve desired outcomes, rather than overtly aiming to reinstate nature’s autonomy as a goal for its own sake. Here we see the

balance of bio’- versus anthropo- centric framing differing across respondents, a point we explore further in section 3.3. This also demonstrates the persistence of particular mindsets which complicate efforts to rework conservation biopolitics, even when the technologies and targets of governance are amended.

*“What we need to do is look at the land right now and where it could get to... and which outcomes do we want? For us the best way of doing that is through natural processes, let nature figure it out” (Interviewee 22)*

The management of fauna poses similar questions around appropriate levels of intervention. In this case the dilemma centres on the extent to which the animals are allowed to be wild. This is particularly contentious in the case of herbivores that have not previously been regarded as wild (e.g. horses at Wicken Fen and Cambrian Wildwood). Perceptions of what constitutes appropriate levels of welfare, and how much management animals should be exposed to, was an area of fraught discussion amongst respondents (c.f. Lorimer and Driessen 2013; von Essen and Allen 2016). Equally, managing the impacts of animals (i.e. pine martens, beavers, foxes, sea eagles) on human property and livelihoods was an area where ongoing intervention was being conducted in most cases (see also Simms et al. 2010; Crowley et al. 2017; Wynne-Jones et al. 2018).

Overall, whilst most projects demonstrate a clear commitment to enhancing nature’s autonomy and becoming more ‘nature-led, there are significant questions regarding the extent to which this occurs in practice. These experiences raise key questions about how ‘letting go’ will work into the longer term, affirming questions on how – or whether – to amend current conservation restrictions to enable rewilding freer rein (Lorimer 2015; Jepson and Shepers 2016; Nogues Bravo et al. 2016). Our insights suggest that although enabling wildness is not straightforward, rewilding is resulting in new spaces for conservation interest, operating outside of older frameworks and notions of what holds conservation value.

### Spaces for Nature...and People?

Our final area of discussion is the extent to which rewilding is being pursued as a uniquely nature-centred set of objectives. To put it another way, to what extent is rewilding being understood, and enacted, as an agenda for nature *and people*? A lot of early critiques have focused on the exclusionary, and potentially misanthropic, framing of the ‘wild’ in rewilding, echoing well acknowledged arguments about the problematic discourse of wilderness (Jørgensen 2015; Ward 2019). Notably, such critiques are connected to a historically framed ambition for wildness as a past condition before human intervention and damage. Given the more forward-looking orientation of the projects observed, we could infer that such concerns have less grounding (supporting Prior and Ward 2016). However, it is still necessary to question whether the projects adopt a relational approach (Ward 2019) in being inclusive of, and indeed targeted towards, human flourishing as part of

the ecosystems they aim to rejuvenate. This is particularly important given persisting concerns surrounding the spatial and ontological division of nature and human culture in contemporary conservation in which wildness serves as a key signifier (Lorimer 2015; Prior and Brady 2016).

In one of the earliest iterations of rewilding advocacy in Britain, Peter Taylor (2005) set out a bio-centric and post-humanist vision in which rewilding was presented as an ethically driven agenda for nature. Whilst humans are seen as part of this vision, it is primarily in terms of achieving spiritual and moral order through a renewed, and reconfigured relationship with the natural world. Some interviewees expressly rejected human-centred rationalities for rewilding:

*"Wild land does have benefits in terms of human welfare... but I do need to emphasise...we specifically felt we were not going the way of most conservation organisations in saying 'for wildlife and people'... We're trying to restore nature for nature's sake primarily." (Interviewee 25)*

But other actors regarded the inclusion of human interest as a longstanding guiding principle both within and beyond the 'established' conservation NGO sector:

*"We don't distinguish in an area for nature and areas for people... for us it [rewilding] is about restoring natural processes...and doing so in a way that people can be involved with and have a stake in that going forward." (Interviewee 22)*

*"Allowing greater opportunity for natural processes to benefit people... It's really important that when we're talking about looking after a landscape that there is a people element there, recognising a living working managed landscape... The long-term goal is simply to strive for a more sensitive balance, towards a functioning natural landscape... but also how we as people engage in that landscape." (Interviewee 24)*

*"There's an upsurge in people saying well this is exciting, we've talked about species, and habitat, and that's all quite dry and this is refreshing. It's...involving people, making things better for people." (Interviewee 27)*

For this broader array of projects, rewilding was fundamentally framed as being about nature and people; achieving a better relationship and balance, by bringing people in greater contact with nature and ensuring people could benefit from a healthier environment. Discussions of 'rewilding ourselves' came to the fore (c.f. Louv 2008; Monbiot 2013). This was articulated in diverse terms, sometimes in strongly spiritual tones that echoed Taylor's (2005) framing, and in other instances as utilitarian framings of human wellbeing connecting to government policy agendas.

*"...nature has a deeply profound healing effect...It is actually crucial to our survival on the planet to realise that we are part of it...rewilding ourselves in the sense of realising that we are already wild, that we are part of nature" (Interviewee 16)*

In both cases, respondents were strident in their conceptualisation of nature conservation as a holistic (people and nature) rather than divided (nature vs people) objective. Their statements demonstrate a clear awareness and reaction against purist notions of nature, and a more reflexive stance amongst practitioners than some earlier commentators would

suggest. There was an acknowledgement that rewilding *could* move in either direction, and hence needed to pursue a more inclusive vision:

*"There's been a bit of backlash in terms of 'what does this word mean?' Some people see it as exclusionist and purist... that this should be somewhere people are kept out of... and if I think that's the case then it's a term that will come and go and fade away. Or is it dynamic and people based? If it's the latter that will give it longevity and I can see people getting on board with that." (Interviewee 22)*

In this regard, a number of projects involved distinctive visitor, education and/or volunteer programmes for supporting people to gain access to project sites and engage directly with activities underway, thereby countering critiques of rewilding as exclusionary project. Some recent projects also involved a social inclusion remit for supporting disadvantaged groups to experience their sites (Interviewee 16). However, in other instances the price tag attached to visitor experiences, along with the distance from larger centres of human population (see Figure 1), pointed to a more socially exclusive model. Several respondents revealed keen attention to questions of social justice, drawing attention to socio-political hierarchies in terms of who had access to land and capacity to gain environmental benefits. Such reflections were most prominently raised in a Scottish context, where inequalities in land ownership and access are marked and scarred by historic violence (see Mackenzie 2008; Deary and Warren 2017).

*"If more people have a stake in the land I think it will be healthier, certainly a healthier society and...a more constructive debate on what should happen. ...a wider range of people benefit from that not just benefiting one group of people..." (Interviewee 22)*

Organisations operating in Scotland also discussed the importance the Land Reform Act (2003 and 2015) in supporting communities to buy land now coming on the market in Scotland, and how this informed the approach they were taking. There was evidence of NGOs supporting communities to buy land and exploring how community and NGO aspirations could be mutually beneficial (Interviewee 27). In other instances, divisions between local communities and those initiating and running projects was blurred, with long term residents playing key roles (e.g. Cambrian Wildwood, COAST, Knoydart Foundation). However, this was not a universal experience and there is the potential danger of external actors seeking to buy-up land in a way that threatens local stakeholders (Wynne-Jones et al. 2018).

The respondents in this study demonstrated awareness of the criticisms that rewilding has faced, including heightened sensitivities to the current Brexit context which has intensified anxieties around land-use change. In contrast to the very adversarial stances aired in the popular press, our interviews and observations reveal more careful and less polarising position.

*"It's not about imposing something, because that won't work... We've said in our public comms 'yeah we definitely support rewilding, and it's not for everyone, it needs to be in*

the right place. You need peoples' consent... For [particular sites] it's not worth looking into but that doesn't mean we can't support it in other places..." (Interviewee 27)

In some instances, there was direct acknowledgement that previous actions and declarations on rewilding were problematic, or unjust, and moving forwards a new approach needed to be taken:

"There needs to be a much clearer pathway on reintroductions that assures people that they are not going to happen in the way some reintroductions happened in the past. People should be much more involved in the decision-making process and much clearer on what the options are in the event that something goes wrong." (Interviewee 23)

Respondents also stressed the work that was now being done as part of their projects to proactively communicate with, and actively support, local communities and businesses to derive benefits. This was in instances where project leaders were both external actors and local residents.

"There's a recognised brand that local businesses use. We've got a new visitors' centre that can help support local businesses which is great... we do a newsletter that goes out to all the parish households. We just supported a new community centre so we're having an open evening... we work beyond our boundaries..." (Interviewee 24)

Rewilding was often positioned as underpinning new business initiatives and as a means to draw in novel forms of income:

"It's an option for people and the community. It's not a threat, we're not forcing them to do it... There's lots of different options... Rewilding is opening up peoples' views for different options for upland management." (Interviewee 27)

The financial sensibilities of this new approach were directly compared to longstanding practices of farming and game-keeping, with claims that rewilding offers increased levels and diversity in forms of employment:

"...we think it can provide more employment and economic activity and be a value to more people by being restored, revived, rewilded if you like. There used to be six shepherds full time [on the site] in 1800, when we bought it there was one part time... in purely economic terms the input that we've provided in terms of people who build fences, plant trees, do survey work, who grow the trees for us, who cull the deer and so on. The employment is actually greater and more varied..." (Interviewee 25)

The emphasis on potential economic opportunity of a more peopled and socially just model of land use was a key message for staff of Rewilding Britain. Whilst this shows notable overlap with the nature-enterprise centred approach of their partners Rewilding Europe, staff within Rewilding Britain justify their thinking more in response to personal experience and connections to communities, rather than in corporately aligned terms.

"Rewilding embraces the role of people – and their cultural and economic connections to the land – working within a wider, healthy ecosystem. Rewilding is a choice of land management. It relies on people making a collective decision

to explore an alternative future for the land." (Rewilding Britain 2017)

Despite these benign intentions, however, many rewilding proposals are incredibly fraught and hotly contested (Wynne-Jones et al. 2018). Although the proposed model of nature-based tourism may be viable in some instances (RSPB 2011; Birnie and Barnard 2016), there is little evidence to indicate that it can be successfully scaled up or provide an effective antidote to post-Brexit rural decline. For some, the recent attempts to reframe the rewilding agenda in economic terms is seen as a betrayal and retreat from core principles (Foreman 2018). In fact, organisations such as Rewilding Britain now contend that they are stuck between two sets of opponents, one for whom their vision is too wild and the other for whom it is not wild enough (pers. comm. 2018).

An important point to consider here is that a human emphasis does not necessarily entail a retreat from the central unifying feature of projects – to grant natural processes more autonomy and create more space for nature. Rather, this central imperative of rewilding can have direct benefits for people, and as we have shown here is being championed as such. But there is a tension of priority here, and whether (or perhaps when) too much autonomy for nature creates problems for people. Whilst we are seeing excitement and demand for working with nature, learning from nature, and becoming more connected with nature, this may only work up until the point that human dis-benefits materialise. This connects to the difficulties highlighted above in relation to management approaches, and whether being nature-led is driven from an anthropocentric perceptive or biocentric one.

Considering these changes in terms of governance, whilst rewilding appears to offer a break with old biopolitical framings, and strictures, these are potentially simply being replaced with new outcomes and metrics that are still denominated by humans for humans. We also observe an awkward juxtaposition of the environmentalities being applied (consciously or otherwise) to nurture rewilding developments (Fletcher 2017). These include on the one hand a market-orientated position that encourages the enhancement of wild nature as a business opportunity and on the other, a more-than-economic stance that desires more attention to, and enrichment of, our own wildness. Nevertheless, rewilding in Britain appears to be moving forward from binary divisions of nature and culture (or at least trying to), demonstrating a much more blurred model of desires and interdependencies, aligned with Ward's (2019) framing of relationality. Practitioners here also demonstrate marked efforts to support non-human and human flourishing in cohesive ways, but there are still many compromises to be worked through. In particular, we have seen tensions not only in terms of how nature is being governed, and to what ends, but also in terms of who is making these decisions and whether they are proximal or distant from the environments in question.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper we set out to address three key questions—1) Who is now involved in rewilding across Britain? 2) What are



they seeking to do, in terms of how nature is conceptualised and managed (or not)? 3) In what ways do their objectives involve people and human-centred aspirations? Our focus here responds to key questions posed in the literature, regarding the biopolitics of rewilding (Lorimer and Driessen 2016; Biermann and Anderson 2017) and seeks to extend earlier insights that have primarily explored the role and approach of pioneering projects.

Our findings demonstrate an expansion of engagement beyond early instigators, reflecting interest and experimentation across the mainstream conservation sector, and new forms of collaboration between NGOs, communities and private partners. This encompasses a combination of new actors coming to the table and a shift in thinking of those well-established within the conservation sector. Whilst the 'Monbiot effect' is undeniable, our discussion evidences a much longer standing and more slowly evolving uptake of ideas about nature-led management, as well as reflecting the sense of opportunity and policy opening that Brexit now offers.

In terms of the conceptualisations of nature underpinning the projects reviewed, we have outlined overlaps between rewilding and wider framings of a 'new conservation' approach (see Collard et al. 2015), which rejects the imperative to manage nature based on fixed (historical) reference points of a desired state, and instead prioritises nature's dynamic and self-regulating capacity. But we have also shown that the past is still relevant for those experimenting with rewilding; both as a source of data and inspiration for how ecosystems can operate (see also Jepson 2019) and in terms of their feelings of loss and obligation (see also Deary and Warren 2019). As such, rewilding, as observed here, appears more measured in the 'future nature' it seeks.

Exploring the forms of (non-)management then undertaken, further distinctions are evident. In particular, whilst all the projects reviewed here place a clear emphasis upon unleashing nature's potential and granting more autonomy to natural processes, we observed numerous limitations to this aspiration in practice. Most prominently from the outset nature was seen to be in need of repair before self-regulation could unfurl. This framing of damage is in stark contrast with the optimism of the new conservation discourse, and shares some aspects of purist notions of nature as untrammelled by human influence. In reality, the rewilding projects occupy an uneasy position between these two poles, demonstrating unresolved tensions regarding requirement for human action or absence (see also Sandom et al. 2019). They reflected the extent to which traditional conservation frameworks (and mindsets) were being reworked, and/or could be escaped.

Our study questions whether rewilding is opening conservation to new actors and new spaces of previously unvalued nature. Although respondents proposed new modalities of governance with different conceptualisations and measures of success (in contrast to the traditional focus on species abundance and habitat condition and composition), their projects demonstrated several instances of return to conventional conservation approaches. This was largely

due to persisting regulatory restrictions (on designated sites in particular), financial obligations (of grants to support conservation work) and risk management (both in threats to life and property, but also public perception). Key tensions were equally present in respondent's motivations to pursue a nature-led approach, that is, whether this objective was an end in itself, or one that was seen to serve other outcomes. However, our analysis also showed an emerging trend for the establishment and extension of rewilding projects on non-designated sites with the explicit aim of circumventing some of the issues outlined above.

Finally, is rewilding now proliferating as an approach for nature *or* people, or one that seeks justice for all lifeforms? Our analysis shows that the latter goal is now widely held, in contrast with some earlier espoused positions. Respondents were both sensitive and reflexive in their positions but unable to free themselves from the exclusionary framings that persist in relation to rewilding. Although some current tensions and openings were linked to the current Brexit context, many of the vulnerabilities and pressures for change were longstanding and should not be seen as uniquely due to Brexit. Nonetheless, the change that will arise from this policy rupture will have marked implications for rewilding in Britain.

In working to ameliorate such tensions and create positive alternatives for land-use futures, rewilding may be seen as moving further toward the anthropocentrism that it otherwise seeks to temper. Evidence from our study, however, indicates that the projects are attempting to move beyond old binaries and offer a more relational pathway (Ward 2019) toward enhancing human-nature connectivity and livelihood opportunities. The avenues pursued are still deeply fraught in terms of whether nature-based entrepreneurship can provide a social and environmentally just mechanism for creating abundant futures. There are tensions in the forms of environmentality presented, with both a sense of needing to invest in nature for business returns and a desire to nurture less reductive modes of being with nature.

Overall, our analysis provides an update on the direction of travel for rewilding in Britain, showing both the extent of current engagement and identifying key trends in thinking and practice. Whilst experimentation and engagement is certainly not uniform, there are key points of alignment, adaptation and common difficulties. In terms of departures from mainstream conservation policy and practice, rewilding in Britain reveals three key differences. First, rewilding is associated with a proliferation of new actors, new mechanisms of finance and new spaces of conservation interest. Second, rewilding as an approach exhibits clear novelty in its stated aim to be nature-led and, despite challenges, attempts to work through ongoing negotiation and experimentation. Finally, rewilding is currently being advocated and pursued as an agenda for people *and* nature, which moves beyond earlier nature conservation paradigms of protecting nature from human influence. However, it remains to be seen whether rewilding advocates can realise their ambitions to popularise and create peopled wild spaces across Britain's landscapes.

Looking to the future, rewilding research and practices will need to examine whether and how new spaces of value can be created outside of the current protected area network. The difficulties faced by rewilding advocates advancing a radically different mode of biopolitics may not simply be tied to existing legal impediments or constraints. Rather, it will require them to decide whether the pursuit of ‘nature-led’ approaches should be tied to human-determined objectives or free to evolve without predetermined outcomes.

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## NOTES

1. i.e. In Scotland, England and Wales.
2. These were undertaken as part of a study including additional interviews with wider stakeholders that are not reported on here, hence the numbering of interviewees (given with quotations) goes up to 27.
3. Whilst the overall sample is shown here to evidence the extent of developments, and publically available material (e.g. marketing material and management plans) are discussed with reference to named projects / organisations, statements and insights from interviewees are anonymised.
4. Projects are described as ‘trailblazers, putting elements of rewilding into practice’: See <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding/rewilding-projects/>. Accessed on June 25, 2019.
5. See <https://treesforlife.org.uk/blogs/article/10-exciting-rewilding-projects-happening-in-the-uk/>. Accessed on June 25, 2019. <https://adriancolston.wordpress.com/2016/10/05/rewilding-and-soft-rewilding/>. Accessed on June 25, 2019. It was beyond our capacity to address all of the projects listed by Trees for Life.
6. Some early initiatives were not initially declared or promoted as rewilding, but claim that they were doing rewilding ‘before it was invented’.
7. It is notable that a high proportion of projects are in Scotland. This reflects not only a higher degree of perceived ‘wildness’, reflecting a lower intensity of land-use due to historic factors (Deary and Warren 2017; Mackenzie 2008) but also greater opportunity for large-scale land-purchase with relatively lower land values than England and Wales and the prevalence of large estates. The Land Reform Act, discussed in section 3.3 has also aided some of these purchases.
8. This is due to the Land Reform Act 2003 and subsequent additions to this supporting ‘communities right to buy’; see <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20180129140103/http://www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Rural/rural-land/right-to-buy/Community>. Accessed on June 25, 2019.
9. See for example <http://www.wandletrust.org/tag/river-restoration/>; <https://knepp.co.uk/river-restoration/> Accessed on June 25, 2019.

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